

## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

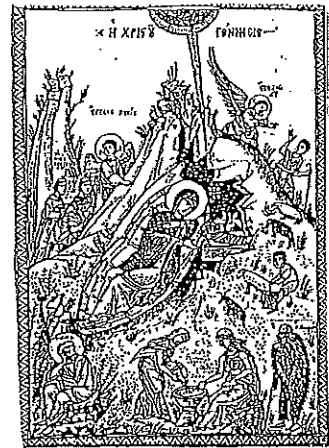
✠ **January 3, 2016** ✠

**Forefeast of Theophany**

**Holy Prophet Malachi (400 B.C.)**

**Martyr Gordius at Caesarea in Cappadocia (314)**

**St. Genevieve of Paris (502)**



**С РОЖДЕСТВОМ  
ХРИСТОВЫМ!**

*Christ is Born! Glorify Him! ~ Christ is baptized!*

- ✠ Tomorrow: Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm > *Ice Skating Today* – 4:00-6:00pm !
- ✠ Tuesday, January 5 - 6:30pm **Theophany Vespers with Great Blessing of Water**  
*Note: January 5, the Eve of Theophany, is a fasting day.*
- ✠ Wednesday, January 6, 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – Feast of Theophany  
w/ Blessing of Water
- ✠ Thursday, January 7, 10:00am ~ Divine Liturgy – **Old Calendar Nativity**
- **Looking Ahead: February 8-11, 2016 ~ Diocesan Pastoral Conference hosted by St. Symeon's. See details on the back of this page...**

### **Thoughts for the New Year**

If our thoughts are peaceful, calm, meek, and kind, then that is what our life is like.

–Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica, Serbia

He began to understand, based on his own experience, that being a Christian meant waging a constant and merciless battle against evil and death in one's own heart, a battle with no front lines and no cease-fires, in which the enemy neither sleeps nor tires. --from *The Life of Elder Thaddeus*

### ***The Worship of the Trinity was made manifest!***

✠ "God the Father is Life, God the Son is Life, God the Holy Spirit is Life: the Holy Trinity is Life. Life is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; if you deny in heart the Father you deny the life of your heart; if you deny the Son, you deny your life; if you deny the Holy Spirit, you also deny your life."

✠ "Could the leaves exist without the tree, and could the tree itself exist without earth, air, water and warmth? Likewise no soul can exist without God, without His Son, without His Spirit. God is my being, my breath, my light, my strength, my drink, my food. He carries me as a mother carries her infant in her arms. More than this. Carrying me, my soul and body, He dwells in me and is united to me."

~ St. John of Kronstadt

### **The Grace of the Spirit, transmitted to the body...**

✠ "Just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to soul and body, since the Lord has deified the flesh through the mediation of the soul to make it also accomplish the works of God; so similarly, in the spiritual human being, the grace of the Spirit, transmitted to the body, through the soul, grants to the body also the experience of things divine, and allows it the same blessed experiences as the soul undergoes. Indeed, it inspires its own sanctification and inalienable divinization, as the miracle-working relics of the Saints clearly demonstrate. ~ St. Gregory Palamas

## **St. Symeon's will host the clergy of the Diocese of the South for the annual Diocesan Pastoral Conference, February 8-11.**

**Volunteers are needed to help out with hospitality during the Conference days. All meals will be catered.**

**Pastoral Conference Schedule – Note liturgical service times in bold –** The Conference gives us an opportunity for additional worship services outside the usual schedule. Metropolitan Tikhon may attend to lead at the Tuesday Liturgy for the Leavetaking of the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

### **Monday, February 8**

2:00pm - Diocesan Council Meeting at St. Symeon Church

**5:00pm - Vespers**

6:30pm – Dean's Meeting / Dinner

### **Tuesday, February 9**

**7:30am - Divine Liturgy – Leavetaking of the Presentation of Christ**

9:30am – Breakfast

10:30am - First Session with Dr. Stephen Muse

1:00pm - Lunch at St. Symeon's

2:30pm - Second Session

**5:00pm - Vespers**

6:00pm - Dinner at St. Symeon's

7:30pm – Administrator and Clergy Gathering

### **Wednesday, February 10**

**8:00am - Matins**

9:30am - Breakfast

10:30am – Third Session with Dr. Stephen Muse

12Noon - Lunch at St. Symeon's

1:30pm – Fourth Session

**5:00pm - Vespers**

6:00pm - Dinner at St. Symeon's

### **Thursday, February 11**

**8:00am – Matins**

9:30am – Breakfast

10:30am – Fifth Session

12Noon – Closing



# THE HOLY TRINITY

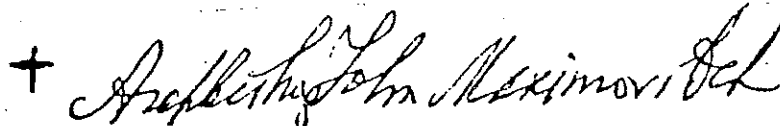
## ONE IN ESSENCE AND UNDIVIDED

FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT have One Nature, One Essence. Thus the Three Persons are the Trinity, One in Essence.

Men have also one nature. But whereas God is a Trinity One in Essence, in men there constantly occur divisions... In Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there are One Thought, One Will, One Activity. What the Father desires, that also the Son desires, and that the Holy Spirit desires. What the Son loves, that also the Father loves, and the Holy Spirit. What is pleasing to the Holy Spirit is pleasing also to the Father and to the Son. Their Activity is likewise one; everything is done jointly and harmoniously.

It is not thus with men. With them there are constant disagreements, diverse desires. A small child already has his own desires, self-will, disobedience to his parents who love him. The older he grows, the more he separates himself from them and, not uncommonly in our times, becomes a complete stranger to them. In general among people there is almost no unanimity of opinion; on the contrary, there are constant divisions in everything, animosities, quarrels between separate persons, wars between peoples. Adam and Eve before the Fall were in everything in agreement between themselves, one in soul. After their sin, however, they immediately felt an estrangement. Justifying himself before God, Adam placed the blame on Eve. Sin divided them and has continued to divide and divide the human race. In freeing ourselves from sin we draw near to God and, being filled with grace from Him, we sense our unity with other human beings. This unity is far from being complete and full, since in everyone there remains some portion of sin. The closer we are to God, the closer we are to each other, in the same way that the rays of the sun become closer to each other the closer they come to the sun. In the coming Kingdom of God there will be unity, mutual love, and harmony. But the Holy Trinity is always unchanging, All-perfect, One in Essence and Undivided. The Trinity One and Undivided always remains the Trinity. The Father always remains Father, the Son - Son, the Holy Spirit - Holy Spirit. Apart from Their personal characteristics, everything in Them is one and common. Thus the Holy Trinity is One God.

Holy, Holy, Holy we cry out to God. The triple repetition of Holy indicates the Trinity, that God is the Holy Trinity. But one cannot say Holy (in the plural), for They are not three, but One God.

+ 

Archbishop John Maximovitch  
San Francisco, California  
May, 1963

On the Eve of the Feast, all draw and carry water to their homes and keep it and preserve it throughout the whole year. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign [of God's grace], for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures for a whole year, or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

## HOLY WATER

ON THEOPHANY, that is, the Day of the Lord's Baptism, every year a great miracle is performed. The Holy Spirit, coming down upon the water, changes its natural properties. It becomes incorrupt, that is, it does not spoil, remains transparent and fresh for many years, receives the grace to heal illnesses, to drive away demons and every evil power, to preserve people and their dwellings from every danger, to sanctify various objects whether for church or home use. Therefore Orthodox Christians with reverence drink Holy Water — a great Agiasma (holy thing), as the Greeks call it.


One should always have at home enough Theophany water so that it will last the whole year, and make use of it at every need: in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students when going to examinations. They do well who daily, before eating any kind of food, drink a little Holy Water. It strengthens the powers of our soul — if it is done, of course, with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect from it a mechanical result.

Every priest should take care to bless a sufficient quantity of water for his church, so that it will be on hand for the course of the whole year for every need and to be given out to those who ask for it; and parishioners should provide themselves at Theophany with Holy Water for the whole year and even so that it can be kept for future years.

*"He took our infirmity"*

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, who came into the world to heal sin by his own sinlessness and to bring human beings into communion with divine life, desire, and indeed demand, to be baptized by John? We know from the gospel that this question was also at the center of John's heart. "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" (Mt 3:14). The following is the Church's response.

By accepting baptism, Christ identifies himself with all people, with all sinners without exception. He identifies himself with every sinner in need of forgiveness, salvation and rebirth... He identifies himself with all and with each one of us. In being baptized, He demonstrates that He came not to judge or condemn, not to bring rules and laws from outside, so to speak, from on high, from the heights of his perfection and divinity, but to be united with us, so that in becoming one of us, He might make us partakers of his perfect and sinless life. John the Baptist said of him, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). Christ entered our world as a child, and in his birth He took upon himself, and made his own, our human nature. The Son of God became

† 

Archbishop John Maximovich  
San Francisco, 1964

the Son of Man. And He did this not for the righteous, but for sinners, for the lost. He loves them with sacrificial love, He gives himself and his whole life to them. Here, in John's baptism, He, the Sinless One, joins with us sinners; He, the Savior, joins with the lost, for there is no sin which can overcome God's love for us. In being baptized He unites himself with the life of sinful human beings, just as later on, at the end He, the Deathless One, also freely unites himself with human beings in death. All of this testifies that Christ desires to save us through love; and only through love, but love means, above all, union with the one whom you love. As the prophet Isaiah said, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases...and with his wounds we are healed" (Is 53:4, 5).

—Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

# How the Christian Should Behave

## St. Basil the Great, Letter XXII

Many things are set forth by Scripture as binding upon all who are anxious to please God. But, for the present, I have only deemed it necessary to speak by way of brief reminder concerning the questions which have recently been stirred among you, so far as I have learnt from the study of inspired Scripture itself. I shall thus leave behind me detailed evidence, easy of apprehension, for the information of industrious students, who in their turn will be able to inform others.

The Christian ought to be so minded as becomes his heavenly calling, and his life and conversation ought to be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

The Christian ought not to be of doubtful mind, nor by anything drawn away from the recollection of God and of His purposes and judgments.

The Christian ought in all things to become superior to the righteousness existing under the law, and neither swear nor lie. He ought not to speak evil; to do violence; to fight; to avenge himself; to return evil for evil; to be angry.

The Christian ought to be patient in whatever he has to suffer, and to convict the wrong-doer in season, not with the desire of his own vindication, but of his brother's reformation, according to the commandment of the Lord.

The Christian ought not to say anything behind his brother's back with the object of calumniating him, for this is slander, even if what is said is true. He ought to turn away from the brother who speaks evil against him; he ought not to indulge in jesting. He ought not to laugh nor even to suffer laugh makers. He must not talk idly, saying things which are of no service to the hearers nor to such usage as is necessary and permitted us by God; so that workers may do their best as far as possible to work in silence; and that good words be suggested to them by those who are entrusted with the duty of carefully dispensing the word to the building up of the faith, lest God's Holy Spirit be grieved.

Anyone who comes in ought not to be able, of his own free will, to accost or speak to any of the brothers, before those to whom the responsibility of general discipline is committed have approved of it as pleasing to God, with a view to the common good.

The Christian ought not to be enslaved by wine; nor to be eager for meats, and as a general rule ought not to be a lover of pleasure in eating or drinking, "for every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things."

The Christian ought to regard all the things that are given him for his use, not as his to hold as his own or to lay up; and, giving careful heed to all things as the Lord's, not to overlook any of the things that are being thrown aside and disregarded, should this be the case.

No Christian ought to think of himself as his own master, but each should rather so think and act as though given by God to be slave to his like minded brethren; but "every man in his own order."

The Christian ought never to murmur either in scarcity of necessities, or in toil or labor, for the responsibility in these matters; lies with such as have authority in them. There never ought to be any clamor, or any behavior or agitation by which anger is expressed, or diversion of mind from the full assurance of the presence of God. The voice should be modulated; no one ought to answer another, or do anything, but in all thing roughly or contemptuously, moderation and respect should be shown to every one. No wily glances of the eye are to be allowed, nor any behavior or gestures which grieve a brother and show contempt. Any display in cloak or shoes is to be avoided; it is idle ostentation. Cheap things ought to be used for bodily necessity; and nothing ought to be spent beyond what is necessary, or for mere extravagance; this is a misuse of our property.

The Christian ought not to seek for honor or claim precedence. Every one ought to put all others before himself.

The Christian ought not to be unruly. He who is able to work ought not to eat the bread of idleness, but even he who is busied in deeds well done for the glory of Christ ought to force himself to the active discharge of such work as he can do.

Every Christian, with the approval of his superiors, ought so to do everything with reason and assurance, even down to actual eating and drinking, as done to the glory of God.

The Christian ought not to change over from one work to another without the approval of those who are appointed for the arrangement of such matters; unless some unavoidable necessity suddenly summons any one to the relief of the helpless. Every one ought to remain in his appointed post, not to go beyond his own bounds and intrude into what is not commanded him, unless the responsible authorities judge any one to be in need of aid. No one ought to be found going from one workshop to another. Nothing ought to be done in rivalry or strife with any one.

The Christian ought not to grudge another's reputation, nor rejoice over any man's faults; he ought in Christ's love to grieve and be afflicted at his brother's faults, and rejoice over his brother's good deeds. He ought not to be indifferent or silent before sinners. He who shows another to be wrong ought to do so with all tenderness, in the fear of God, and with the object of converting the sinner. He who is proved wrong or rebuked ought to take it willingly, recognizing his own gain in being set right. When any one is being accused, it is not right for another, before him or any one else, to contradict the accuser; but if at any time the charge seems groundless to any one, he ought privately to enter into discussion with the accuser, and either produce, or acquire, conviction. Every one ought, as far as he is able, to conciliate one who has ground of complaint against him. No one ought to cherish a grudge against the sinner who

repents, but heartily to forgive him. He who says that he has repented of a sin ought not only to be pricked with compunction for his sin, but also to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. He who has been corrected in first faults, and received pardon, if he sins again prepares for himself a judgment of wrath worse than the former. He, who after the first and second admonition abides in his fault, ought to be brought before the person in authority, if it happens that after being rebuked by more he may be ashamed. If even thus he fail to be set right he is to be cut off from the rest as one that makes to offend, and regarded as a heathen and a publican, for the security of them that are obedient, according to the saying, When the impious fall the righteous tremble. He should be grieved over as a limb cut from the body. The sun ought not to go down upon a brother's wrath, lest it happens that night come between brother and brother, and make the charge stand in the Day of Judgment.

A Christian ought not to wait for an opportunity for his own amendment, because there is no certainty about the morrow; for many after many devices did not reach the morrow. He ought not to be beguiled by over eating, whence come dreams in the night. He ought not to be distracted by immoderate toil, nor overstep the bounds of sufficiency, as the Apostle says, "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content;" unnecessary abundance gives appearance of covetousness, and covetousness is condemned as idolatry.

A Christian ought not to be a lover of money, nor lay up treasure for unprofitable ends. He who comes to God ought to embrace poverty in all things, and to be riveted in the fear of God, according to the words, "Rivet my flesh in thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgments."

The Lord grant that you may receive what I have said with full conviction and show forth fruits worthy of the Spirit to the glory of God, by God's good pleasure, and the cooperation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## More Thoughts for the New Year

**Fr. Arseny (of the Gulag, +1973) said that many people try to help their acquaintances, their friends, or their colleagues, but not their blood relatives – mother, father, grandmother, sister, brother. He explained, "In helping your acquaintances, you show yourself to be so good and responsive: 'See what a good Christian I am!' Helping your father or mother is dull, uninteresting, not noticeable to those around you. A rude word addressed to friends or acquaintances is something you simply know is considered unacceptable...but carelessness, rudeness, or irritation toward your relatives, especially towards your parents, is considered almost normal. People do not realize it is a heavy sin."**

✘ Prayer demands that the mind should be pure of all thought and should admit nothing not belonging to prayer, even if it were good in itself. As if inspired by God the mind should withdraw from all things and hold its converse with Him alone. **St. Nilus of Sinai**

**If you want your sins to be 'covered' by the Lord (cf. Ps. 32:1), do not display your virtues to others. For whatever we do with our virtues, God will also do with our sins. St. Diadochos of Photiki**

### Obedience

✘ If you do something because that is the way your heart is inclined, where is the obedience? You are merely following your own will and your own tastes. If you recognize your motives, you make such self-willed action slightly better. But in true obedience, you obey without seeing the reason for what you are told to do, and in spite of your own reluctance. A special blessing is promised for such an obedience – the blessing of being preserved free from all harm when the duty imposed on you is fulfilled. When this obedience is performed for the sake of the Lord, then the Lord takes His obedient servant under His own care and looks after him.

**St. Theophan the Recluse**

**Prayer, until our very death, will require coercion on our part – a constant struggle.**

**St. Barsanouphios of Optina**

### Work and Pray

+ When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert he was beset by boredom, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, 'Lord, I want to be saved but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?'

A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him: 'Do this and you will be saved.' At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

**The Russian ascetic Elder Tikhon's advice was: "My child, you must wash Jesus' feet with your tears, and He will, in turn, wash your sins away."**

**Athonite Gerontikon**

### The Danger of Guiding Ourselves

"For this reason, we should, with all our strength, guide ourselves toward God's will and not trust in our own heart. Even if there is a good thing to be done, but we have the testimony of some Saint that it is not good, we must on the one hand hold that it is good, but on the other, not trust in our own ability to perform it properly in the way it should be done. We must do all that we can, but at the same time, ask advice as to how to do it. After we have done it, we should ask if we have done it well, and even when we act thus must not be carefree but await the judgment of God. As the saintly man, Abba Agathon said, when he was asked, 'Are even you afraid, father?' He replied, 'I have done what I could but I do not know if my work pleased God. God's judgment is one thing, and man's, another.' May God shelter us from the danger of guiding ourselves, and make us worthy of the way of our Fathers." **St. Dorotheos of Gaza**

**We are not making a *Better World*...** We're waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

**We have no commandment from God to make the world a better place. We have no commandment from God to "make a difference." Only God makes a difference and only God knows what "better" would actually mean.** As Christians, the proper life is one lived in accordance with the commandments. We should love. We should forgive. We should be generous and kind. We should give thanks to God always and for everything.

We should understand that this is a description of the "better world." We are not making a better world, we're waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God. With every act of love, there is the Kingdom. With every act of forgiveness, there is the Kingdom. Every act of generosity and kindness sees its inauguration. As Christ told us, "The Kingdom of God is among you."

Modernity is the practice and faith of gross idolatry. We worship technology, money, politics, science, everything that we believe is a human tool capable of building a better world. No tool is any better or different than the people who use them. A bad man cannot use a good tool to make a good world. A bad man makes a bad world and nothing more.

When we were baptized, we were asked to renounce the devil. More than that, we were asked to *spit* on him. That same devil suggested to Christ that he could make the world a better place if only He would bow down and worship the devil. Christ rebuked him. The same offer has been made to us. It is called "modernity," and it is a devil's bargain.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

*Comment* - Michael Baumann:

All modern political movements have their roots in the same dung pile: the myth that we not only can but should make the world a better place. That is a lie. It is the same lie we were told in the Garden in a slightly different form...

At best the lie distracts us from our true purpose, union with Jesus Christ. At worse it inflames our passions and leads us into direct and willful participation in evil.

We are not in charge of history. Anyone who seriously attempts to fast and pray very quickly finds out we are not even in charge of our own thoughts and bodies because we are so estranged from ourselves and God is far away. Noise and desires typically overwhelm.

Modern ideological politics is a nihilist project to keep us riled up and at each other's throats so those who want the power can have it, promising to make the world a better place, save the children, enlighten the ignorant and ensure justice for all...

**Only God IS. The rest is derivative, finite and subject to death especially our demonically inspired megalomania. The real solution is terrifyingly simple: be human as Christ made us to be. Fast, pray, give alms, forgive everyone, give glory to God in worship and the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all, repent.** So much easier to buy the lie that we must make a difference through coercively making folks do the right thing for the greater good, eh?

No matter where one is on the political spectrum it all partakes of the same lie. All the ideologies are idols.

---

**Communism** was responsible for the deaths of some 150 million human beings during the twentieth century. The world remains inexplicably indifferent and uncurious about the deadliest ideology in history... We rightly insisted upon total de-nazification; we rightly excoriate those who now attempt to revive the Nazis' ideology. But the world exhibits a perilous failure to acknowledge the monstrous history of Communism.

- Claire Berlinski